



Source: Sarah Baxter, 'US hatches plan to carve up Iraq', *Sunday Times* in *The Australian online*, 09/10/06.

Tags: [animals](#), [diplomacy](#), [disenchantment](#), [food](#)
Writer/s: [Jacqui Shine](#)

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Someone once advised me that the best way to stop despising the people you despise is to actually talk to them, and so I decided, in the new year, to try it. I wanted to stop hating people, but most particularly my frienemies, if you will, the people whom I couldn't stand to be around but had to see all the time anyway. I didn't know how, and besides, I sort of liked that angry energy, and I wasn't about to just let go. But I decided to take his advice and, in a well-meaning sort of way, embark on something of an experiment: talking to my enemies.

First I asked Douglas to have coffee one day, in between meetings, because every time I saw his stupid pinched face across the conference table at one of those meetings, and every time he opened his stupid mouth to tell everyone that they'd simply missed the point, I sort of wanted to scream. So I asked him to coffee one day to see if talking to him might not improve things. Well, it didn't. It absolutely did not work. I was trying to be casual, which might have been the issue, because the problem with talking to your enemies is that sometimes they don't know that they're your enemies, and you can't just tell them that, so you have to play it cool instead. I played it cool, all right, and I ended up giving stupid Douglas every opportunity to expound upon whatever the hell it was that he wanted. Instead of, you know, trying to figure out what was in his head, he just told me, unasked, what was in his head. Which enraged me. So by the end of the conversation, I didn't have any coffee left because all I did was sip sip sip sip sip it while clenching my free hand under the table in rage, and Douglas had a mug full of cold stupid foamy cappuccino because he talked the entire time without taking a single breath. Experiment One results: still hated Douglas. If possible, may have hated him more.

I sulked about the Douglas failure for a couple of days, intermittently fuming about his stupid shiny forehead, before I told myself, Self, you gotta get back on the horse. This hypothesis about talking to your enemies can't just fail after one bad outing. So then I called Betsy, who I just loathe, and asked her to lunch. We went to this little French place around the corner from the apartment we used to live in together, before she asked me to move out because my long showers were running up the water bill and besides, she really just couldn't handle leaving the windows open at night, and didn't I just think it would be best if I found somewhere else? Because I pretend to be the bigger person, I conceded quite graciously and spent a desperate couple of weeks looking for a new place,

gritting my teeth every time she opened the door while simultaneously conducting a hostile toilet-flushing campaign that I made out was diarrhea. So anyway. I called Betsy and we met for lunch and everything was going fine—I actually quite liked hearing about her wretched childhood; the story about the lost puppy managed to wring some pity out of me—until she erroneously assumed that I was picking up the check 'since I still owed her for the July water bill.' I paid for her stupid French dip sandwich—in a French restaurant, she orders the fucking French dip sandwich—but, unfortunately, when we crossed paths at the grocery pretty much every week after that it was all I could do to keep from hissing between my still-gritted teeth. Experiment Two: still hated Betsy, and now unable to carry out retaliatory garden-watering scheme.

One more! I told myself, after the Betsy misadventure. And no more meals! So when I ran into Trish at the newsstand near the train station, post-commute, I suggested casually that we take our dogs over to the dog park together. Trish and I hadn't spoken in months, though I made sure to exclaim about how time DOES get away, doesn't it, and how HAS she been, even though I already knew all about that from the best friend of her ex-boyfriend who before that was MY boyfriend. So Trish and I went to the dog park, and I was prepared for it to go well, but she, well, how do I say this without sounding totally catty? She was wearing her jodhpurs again. She was wearing her jodhpurs and I said, casually, that she looked lovely, but that I didn't know there was a stable around here? Oh, no, Trish said, and laughed. It's just, you know, an aesthetic. An aesthetic. If there's anything I hated about Trish, it was that she was all aesthetic, no content. I had nothing to say to her. So we sat on the bench, Pinky sniffing Rosie's butt, and we talked only about our dogs. I surprised myself with how much I had to say about Rosie's bowel movements, and with the fascinated tone in my voice as Trish told me about Pinky's last haircut. I'm not going to lie: I felt better when she stepped in some shit on the way out and didn't even notice. Experiment Three: Trish and I are done. Done! The jodhpurs did me in.

The whole thing was ultimately a failure. My enemies! My frienemies! I kept talking and talking and all it did was remind me why they were my enemies in the first place. But, you know, at least Trish stepped in that dog shit.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Jacqui Shine.